

THE VOICE

ISSUE 22, JUNE 2022



We can only grow the way the wind blows.

ON THE COVER — FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: BACK — **Lexxy Dodge, Olivia MacDonald, Sky-Lynn Brochu, Wesley Roberts**; FRONT — **Ella, Cat Elder, Ammy Purcell**
Cover and launch photos by Ashley Blenkhorn photographer



Why Did I Come To The Voice?

LEXXY DODGE

I came back to *The Voice* because I really enjoyed it and I missed everyone. It is a really good opportunity for anyone who wants to come. I also enjoy writing.

ANONYMOUS

I came to *The Voice* because Khiara's social worker told me about it. I was nervous that it was going to be super strict, but I found it really fun and supportive. I did really like the idea of getting money while coming here.

SKY-LYNN BROCHU

I heard about *The Voice* from my social worker. She said "there is a program called *The Voice* where kids in care can write about their feelings and things like, put pen to paper, and you get paid!" She told me I had to go and tried to make me. So I went because I was forced. Then I decided to stay because I liked when I realized I was not the only one that went through shit in life. I felt I like I fit in finally. I like that I get paid to come every Wednesday. I hope to have fun with this program. I'm glad I came to see how this program worked. It was nothing like what I was told.

CATHERINE ELDER

This is going to be my third year at *The Voice*. To be honest, three years ago I joined *The Voice* just for the money. I knew it was wrong, but who doesn't want pocket money to spend? As time went on, I kept coming back. I learned to enjoy the people who were there and they became my best friends, even more like a family to me. *The Voice* is my safe haven. I now know, no matter what, they wouldn't judge me or turn me away. I feel like I've finally found a place where I belong.

Managing school

CATHERINE ELDER

What makes school difficult for me is that I'm a hands on learner. I need one-on-one help. If the workload is too much, I get too much anxiety. Having too much on my plate stresses me out.

Things that help me manage these are extra time to get tests or assignments and homework passed in, listening to music, being in a safe quiet place, and having things read to me if I don't understand.



Executive Director's Note

Welcome to the 22nd edition of *The Voice*! This is my fourth year of Executive Director, and sixth year with the program. When I thought, I couldn't find more passion and have more pride for the program, the youth participants, our dedicated program manager, Ammy Purcell, and our volunteers proved me wrong again. Through riding the waves of Covid-19, travelling far distances to attend, and mentoring younger participants, this year was another success! I can't wait for you to read what our youth have to say about their lives, experiences, opinions and dreams.

While you're reading this year's issue, I want you to take a moment and really think about the lives of our young people today. It is so different than even 10 years ago when I was a teenager. Take a moment to appreciate how vulnerable they are in sharing pieces of their lives with you, their weaknesses and their strengths. Doing so, I believe you will gain a new perspective, and perhaps even learn a bit more about yourself. Afterwards, think about the last time you were vulnerable with a stranger, or even someone close to you. It is our vulnerabilities that bring us together, and that is something *The Voice* is seasoned with.

This year are participants truly encompassed all of HRM, from the core downtown to as far as East Hants. Our participants came together in person, when it was permitted, as well as virtually when needed to keep ourselves safe from Covid-19. We also welcomed three returning participants not as typical participants, but as facilitators-in-training. This is the first time we have had facilitators in training in quite some time. These three

participants worked closely with Ammy to learn how to lead sessions, mentor the younger participants and facilitate aspects of the program. It was a full-circle moment to watch someone I mentored six years ago, now mentor someone else. It is the fact that so many youth participate year after year and "never want to leave" (their words, not mine), that I know this program works and has a positive influence in the lives of the participants. I am humbled to be a part of their experience here with Youth Voices.

**It is our vulnerabilities that bring
us together, and that is something
The Voice is seasoned with.**

Ammy Purcell, marks another year as the Program Director and Youth Voices would not be possible without her. She works tirelessly to make sure our youth have transportation to and from the program, feel welcomed and supported, and understand the content and purpose of the program. In her words, she doesn't think about her role here as a job, as she loves it so much, and that is something I wish for everyone. Ammy, a simple thank you isn't enough, but I hope it can show how much you mean to me as a partner in this role.

This year, we welcomed one new board member, Michaela Singer. With new faces, we also say goodbye to one board member, Alice Kitz. All of our board members bring a unique perspective to the table, to create the vision for Youth Voices. Our dedicated Chair, Dianne Hussey, has a lifelong passion for helping youth, and has been a tremendous supporter of the program over the years. We are very lucky to have her on our team.

Another volunteer in the program, Olivia McDonald, also sits on our board, and meets with the group weekly to aid in the facilitation of the sessions. She is a wonderful addition to the program, and we very much appreciate her dedication. Olivia is someone the youth have grown to think of as a peer and constant support for them.

This program could not be possible without you, the readers, or funders, or supporters of the youth participants. Each one of you has an important part in making this program a reality for the youth. On behalf of the board of directors and youth, I thank you.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition of *The Voice*!



Olivia, Kaitlin and Ammy

Program Director's Note

Here we are once again. Another successful program year is over. Nine months of Wednesday evening sessions. Nine months sounds like a long time, but it really only works out to be about 72 hours, give or take. That is how much time our group gets to spend with each other. One long weekend if you put it all together. How well can you actually get to know someone in 72 hours? Would you be able to say that person is now a friend? Possibly. A friend for life? Probably not. Putting all 72 hours together would significantly lessen the ability to truly get to know these youth. Spreading it out over nine months I get to see them grow, learn, begin to trust, and embrace the concept of commonality. They develop friendships, unbreakable bonds that can last a lifetime. A friend for life. Because this life isn't quite as scary when you have a friend who is facing the same scary things you are.

If you have been following this publication for as long as I have been director, I am about to sound like a broken record. You've been warned. But it must be said. Each year I am continually blown away by the way these young people come together. The acceptance and guidance shown by the returning participants is so heart warming. This makes it easy for new participants to feel welcomed and lets them become just as much a part of the group as the ones who have been coming for years. This year we had the chance to allow our "senior" youth facilitate sessions on their own. Brandy, Chloe, and Wesley have been with us for so long now they know the program inside-out. They took on this leadership role easily by being such respectable, mature, but relatable role models. I am so very proud of each of them. Maybe next year I can sit back and relax, let them do all the work. Just kidding, I enjoy it too much.

If you are a social worker, foster parent, group home staff, or work with youth in care in any way, please tell them about this program.

Speaking of next year, we really want to increase enrollment for the 2022-2023 program year. Now that pandemic restrictions are behind us and we have a stable meeting space with lots of room, we would really like to gather more youth in care to participate in this awesome program. If you are a social worker, foster parent, group home staff, or work

with youth in care in any way, please tell them about this program. Ages 13-18 are welcome. Temporary, permanent, or even previously in care. We rely on you, the guardians and supports to send these youth our way so they can have the opportunity to join us. If they aren't presented with the opportunity, they may miss out on something that could change their path in life for the better. Given the nature of this specific demographic it is very difficult for us to recruit the youth on our own. Nearly impossible. So please, spread the word. Recruiting begins in August but I will accept referrals at any time. Referrals can be sent to ammy.thevoice@yahoo.com

Thank you for your continued interest in *The Voice*, Youth in Care Newsletter. Thank you to our Board of Directors, Our dedicated volunteer Olivia MacDonald and of course, our Executive Director Kaitlin Wolfe. We make a great team!



Executive Director, Kaitlin Wolfe, Board Chair, Dianne Hussey, and Program Director, Ammy Purcell at the 2021 launch

Mental Health

KHIARA MCGATH

I want to talk about mental health. I just want to tell you, you're not alone. Because it might feel like it. Having anxiety and depression is like being scared and tired at the same time. It's fear of failure but no urge to be productive. It's wanting friends but hating socializing. It's wanting to be alone but not wanting to be lonely. It's feeling everything at once and then feeling nothing. Most of your stress comes from the way you respond, not the way life is. Adjust your attitude and all of that extra stress is gone. The battle to breathe, gasping for air, it feels like you're suffocating. "I'm losing it... heart pounding... throat closing, pressure in my head, i've got to escape, quick, this is too intense. "

Then you think that it is done but it's not done, you think this will never end, that a panic attack will never leave you. If you want to kill yourself, go in the water. You'll see yourself fighting to stay alive, suicidal people don't look for attention when they say they want to kill themselves. There are so many more mental health problems, but I named some. I know what this feels like because I struggle with mental health. You're not alone, you are not the first and you will not be the last.



CATHERINE ELDER

Mental Health is like being a stranger in your own body or it's like being in a crowded room and you're screaming your lungs out yet no one can hear you. I've been there and felt that. One of my biggest problems is my eating disorder. I was diagnosed with five months ago yet I still can't wrap my head around it because honestly, I thought it was normal to hate the way you look. I used to weigh myself at least twice a day because I was scared to gain weight, or when I ate I would count the calories and sugars so I knew how many laps around the block I would need to do. I used to hate eating in front of people and I always wore baggy clothes, I truly thought that it was normal. I also was diagnosed with ADHD as a child and was on Adderall for a couple of years but being on Adderall helped my eating disorder. I wouldn't eat at all and I had only one meal a day for about five years then we decided to take me off of it. I won't go on pills to manage my ADHD because I have been off the meds for so long I learned some coping skills to help me with it. I also have PTSD. I have night terrors, I'm constantly looking over my shoulder, I get scared when people move too fast around me, and I'm scared of loud noises. I have really bad anxiety to the point where some days I can't leave my bedroom, I have anxiety attacks when I'm out in public alone and I have panic attacks when I'm in a crowded room.

I also suffer from depression where some days it's so bad I can't have any sharp objects, I can't cut my own food, use pens or pencils, or shave. I had to get supervised for everything, I struggle with self harming and I always will but as years go on I'm learning coping skills that work for me, I lack motivation a lot and I completely drain myself to please others giving everything all I got.

Social Workers

ANONYMOUS

Social workers are slow, stupid and pointless. Because they never get back to you and don't help when you need them. I want them to help me with my house situation.

I would like social workers that actually respect me when I ask them questions. I don't like when they force me to talk to them about things I'm not ready to share.

SKY-LYNN BROCHU

I have had three social workers that I know of. They all said they will never lie to me, but they did more than once. They take forever to reply to me (around 4-6 weeks or more). If they can't find an answer, they tell me to find my own answer. I also can't rely on them for anything they say. Finally, they never keep their promise. I never trust my social workers.

Facilitators in Training

CHLOE

This year at *The Voice* has been a learning year. This will be my fifth year and it's definitely been different. From writing less to teaching more, reading from books to writing on boards, or helping the other kids understand the activities or assignments, it was nice being in charge and having other people look up to you. It was definitely hard knowing I wouldn't have as much writing in the magazine, but it's totally worth it to see the younger people improve on their writing and confidence in sharing.

BRANDY

This year my role at *The Voice* was a little different. For the past few years I've been one of the youth writing about my experiences within the system and sharing my life with you as you watched me grow to be the person I am today. This year I became a facilitator. It was amazing being able to mentor the youth that came this year. Even if they didn't stay for long, they all had a special spot in my heart. Having the youth look up to me and ask me for advice made me feel like I wasn't just putting all the hard work in for nothing. It made me feel like I was actually making a change for youth that needed someone to talk to.

Being able to help set up activities for everyone and make sure meetings were staying on track was fun. I got to see my younger self helping them through activities. Feeling nervous to participate, unsure if this is even good enough, feeling insecure. I'm glad I got to help them through those

challenges, making sure that they are heard through their writing and knowing they are important.

I can't wait for the next year, to meet new youth, hear their stories and be a part of their future

WESLEY

I've been in *The Voice* for about 4 or 5 years now (either way, it's been a long time). Brandy, Chloe and I are all facilitators in training. We do lessons with the other kids, and we have different roles. One of us may draw or write on the board (usually me) and the other will explain what we're doing or read from a book. Another may help someone who doesn't know what to do. I think it's pretty cool to be doing it.



Brandy, Wesley, Chloe at the
2021 Outstanding Youth Achievement Awards



Wesley, Brandy and Chloe in 2018

Holiday Memories

KHIARA MCGATH

When I was 8, I had the best Christmas ever. On Christmas, I had a lot of presents under the tree. For Christmas, I got an iPad, earrings, dolls and a lot of clothes. Then we had four Christmas dinners. Then I went to my uncles for dinner and I got new books. Then we stayed up till 12:25am. Then, on Boxing Day, I went through all of my presents and for dinner, I went to my mom's, and me and my brother stayed up till 1:00am, then I went home.

ANONYMOUS

My favourite memory is Christmas when I was 11 years old I went to the movies with my mom and dad. We got new clothing and we got shoes. I got lots of dolls and lots of candy. I got some big fluffy blankets. I love that day!



Christmas party at Veith House

L-R: Wesley, Khiara, Brandy, Chloe Lexxy, Rayan, Ella. FRONT Olivia, Cat

A law I would make if I were Queen

LEXXY DODGE

If I was queen, I would make it a law that people who abuse animals would get a harsh jail sentence because animals are really important in my life. I find animals help with my mental health.

CATHERINE ELDER

A law I would invent if I were Queen is that all Feminine/Baby Products are free. I think feminine products should be free because it is not as if a female asked to have her period once a month. I think baby products like diapers, wipes, formula should all be free because it is very hard to take care of yourself let alone a baby.

A law I would change is the legal voting age to 16/17 because we (teenagers) should have our opinions and voices heard just like any adult. Especially because we are the future it should matter what we want our world to look like.

Something that I would completely change is the way we take care of our community there should more police cars in high risk neighborhoods, have a health center where teenagers can come for sexual help, and more trash cans.

Favorite Thing About Myself

CATHERINE ELDER

Honestly, this has been a question I have struggled with my whole life, but as I grew over the years, I have slowly been able to answer it a little bit more each time.

For the longest time, I hated when people asked me this question. For as long, as I can recall I have hated the way I looked from the top of my head all the way down to how my pinky toes curl, to the bump in my nose and more. I used to hate when my family would say that I looked like my birth mom because it would bring back flashbacks of how badly she used to treat me and my siblings. Over time, I am getting more comfortable with the idea of looking like her. Even though she was awful to us, she was beautiful on the outside, but never on the inside and I never ever want to be like that. I have been trying my hardest to change my mindset and life so that it is beautiful inside and out. I also have been trying to boost my confidence so that I can answer this question.

My favorite thing about myself is my personality. I know how to take care and talk to people. I can make people laugh and smile. I love my eyes. They have many different colours in them, but they are mostly blueish green. I enjoy doing makeup that makes my eyes stand out more. I love my smile. I recently had braces so now my teeth are model perfect and it gives me the confidence to show them off.

ANONYMOUS

1. Helping others ex: helping my sister with her baby
2. Being alone ex: shopping alone go out alone
3. Listening to music

I spent the afternoon helping my sister by taking care of her baby. This is something I like about myself after spending this morning helping my sister. I wanted to have some alone time so I went shopping to pick up some gifts for them. I like shopping.

Tree of life art project

The tree of life art project is about identifying our hopes, dreams and ambitions, who we are, and celebrating those things. Each part of the tree represents something special in our lives. Here are some examples of what was created.



by Cat



by Sky-Lynn

Where do I see myself in 5 years?

LEXXY DODGE

I see myself having graduated from college and working as a social worker, I will hopefully have my own place and have some animals plus I will hopefully have my own car as well.

CATHERINE ELDER

In five years, hopefully I will be finished post-secondary schooling. I'll have my own place. I'll have my Canadian government ID. I'll have my driver license and my own car hopefully, and I'll have a job placement for my massage therapy.

CHLOE ROBERTS

Reminding myself that I'm only 18. I don't need to have my life together and dropping out of university was the best decision I ever made. I dropped out of university because going to university and taking courses that have nothing to do with the profession I want to do wasn't for me. I applied to a college CBBC to be exact to become a CCA (continuing care assistance) and that was 100% the best decision I ever made. I haven't been this excited about something. I start May 16th and will have my license by December.

ANONYMOUS

I see myself as a business woman. Things I need to get there:

- Finish school
- Understand your limitations and establish boundaries
- Great opportunities to step outside of your comfort zone
- Exercise your right to invest in your well being
- Serve in your community
- Cultivate relationships

Graduation

LEXXY DODGE

To say I'm excited is an understatement. I've never been more proud of myself. When I was younger, I really didn't expect to make it this far and I DID! This is a huge goal that I can finally say I accomplished. These last 12 years of going to school have been difficult, but I got through it and now I'm on to bigger and better things. One thing I wish school would have taught me was the next steps in life. I don't really know what happens next but I think I might become a teacher. I do have a lot of people to thank who helped me achieve my goal and they know who they are!



The Voice crew with United Way at the Halifax Wanderers Soccer Game

In Memorium: Chrytine Reid

Chrystine Lee Reid (Chryssie) 1987-2022

by Ammy Purcell



Chryssie had been part of *The Voice* family since 2004. She was an amazing writer back then at age 16. Her articles were deep and moving, as well as thought provoking. She remained with the program on and off until 2006.

Chryssie went on to become a wife and mother of four children. She continued to love art, music, writing, and cooking – anything that involved being creative.

In 2018, Chryssie came back to *The Voice* as an adult volunteer just wanting to be involved again. It was great getting to see her, catch up, and talk about how much our lives have changed now that we're grown up. She loved to talk about her children and her husband, Devin. She was happy and wanted to spread that to others.

“Being with *The Voice* taught me that I had a voice even as a minor. I only hope that my children will feel like they have the same voice”

Chrystine, The Voice, 2015

She was a strong supporter of *The Voice*, and we were happy to have her join our group. Thank you, Chryssie, for staying in touch and always offering a helping hand.

Chrystine passed away at home on Sunday, May 1, 2022, after suffering from a seizure disorder. She leaves behind her husband Devin and four children, Faith, Elizabeth, Riley, and Charlie. A Go Fund Me page has been set up to help support Devin and the children: <https://gofund.me/aed3ca96>

Living life is like playing the piano

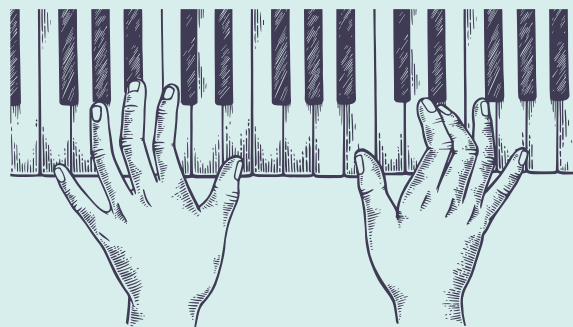
Written by Chrystine for The Voice, 2004

Living life is like playing the piano. Your fingers drift like years. Playing all the same notes but not necessarily all the right ones.

No one can ever now the feelings that soar through me, like an eagle with the freedom to do as it pleases. The thoughts I carry echo through my mind like the Canadian loon on a foggy summer morning upon a lake of mercury. My spirit clips with the paddle upon my journey across a land so pure. These are the images and sounds I feel and I hear. With every passing moment my heart beats like the drum upon the hills, the voices of the mountains whisper to me. Painting images with the colours of the wind.

May this be my pass, or could this be my future? Living in the serenity of nature.

Then I wake up... Cars rushing by, smog upon the sunrise, sirens going off in the background. No longer can I hear the drum, no longer can I see the colours. My world is a palette of black and white. A palette which only man can create.



**This memorial page was printed with permission from Chryssie's family.*

Citadel Hill Ghost Walk



Wesley, Chloe, Lexxy, Brandy & Olivia take in the haunted history of Halifax's Citadel Hill

OLIVIA MACDONALD

Vice Chair, Secretary and Weekly Volunteer

Wow! Another newsletter makes history. Hi, my name is Olivia MacDonald. I am 25 and my journey with *The Voice* began back in 2018 when I joined as a volunteer. I knew this program was special from the moment I started. I am so grateful to be able to continue into 2022. *The Voice*, Youth In Care Newsletter Project, offers programming for adolescents in care. It's a safe, inclusive and fun environment where our youth learn key life and literacy skills through both hands on and off learning. Positive communication about emotions, experiences, and ideas are fostered through the program and the youth are able to connect and relate to one another in a truly beautiful way. Although COVID keeps trying to slow down our progress, our youth are so dedicated and *The Voice* has persevered. Our directors, Ammy and Kaitlin, work tirelessly to organize the program and allow the youth to feel heard. The newsletter is a fantastic way to showcase their messages and artwork from throughout the year.

Our youth really embrace everyone's differences with open arms, and I learn a new perspective after every session I experience. I can't wait to see what's in store for the next year to come. Congratulations on all of your hard work, everyone! You did it!



The Voice group designing t-shirts for this year's art project.

30 Seconds

WESLEY ROBERTS

A lot of things can happen in thirty seconds. A proposal, a declaration of love, a pregnancy, the discovery of a disease, Oprah Winfrey making 500 dollars. When you think about it, that may not be that much. I mean, how often do people propose anyway? What can thirty seconds do really? Well, for Oprah it can buy a new pair of Louis Vuitton's. But for the rest of us, thirty seconds has infinite possibilities. And since there are 60 seconds in a minute, 60 minutes in an hour, and 24 hours in a day, that means the rest of us have 86,400 thirty-seconds moments every day that hold infinite possibilities.

Missing a Parent

ANONYMOUS

I miss my mom. I miss going out shopping with my mom. I miss having a movie night and laughing together. Cooking and making desserts together. I miss my dad. I have not seen my dad in nine months. I miss fixing stuff with my dad. I miss playing and laughing. I miss my family. I miss playing with them. I love playing with them. I just miss them so much. I hope I get to see my dad soon. I hope I go home soon.

My sister's wedding is coming up and I want to go but my social worker said I cannot. I feel that is so unfair.

Rocky Horror Picture Show

WESLEY ROBERTS

The rocky horror picture show play that we went to see, was amazing. I watched the movie beforehand so I knew what I was getting into. And my god it was the best thing I've ever seen in my life. Everyone was so beautiful and had such good singing voices and sounded exactly like the characters from the movie. And the one who played Frank N Furter was... In the best words "va va voom. And Riff Raft!" Everything was just perfect. 10/10 would definitely see again.

"... Va Va Voom. And Riff Raft!"

CATHERINE ELDER

We went to Rocky Horror show as a group and I loved it! It was fabulous with all the outfits, the songs and dances. I wanted to be up on stage with them so bad.



The Voice crew with the cast of "Somebody to Love" at Grafton Street Dinner Theatre

THANK YOU!



Our thanks to the following individuals and organizations for their support of our project this year.

INDIVIDUALS

Alice Kitz — Board of Directors
Andrew Safer — Founder, Board of Directors
Angeles Hopkins — Bookkeeper
Anne Jennex-Roberts — Treasurer, Board of Directors
Annie Baert — Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Education
Ashley Blenkhorn — Photography
Barry Schmidl — Department of Community Services, Manager of Service Provider Relations
Cheryll Hopper — Casino Taxi
Dianne Hussey — Chair, Board of Directors
Gil McMullin — Board of Directors
Jane Landry — Halifax Region Children Aid Foundation
Johnathan King — Board of Directors
Kyle MacIsaac — Mathews Dinsdale & Clark LLP
Leigh Daniels — Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Education
Lisa Neily — Graphic designer
Michaela Singer — Board of Directors

Olivia MacDonald — Adult volunteer, Vice Chair, Secretary, Board of Directors
Sandra McKenzie — Halifax Youth Foundation
Sandy MacDonald — Advisor
Stacey Greenough — Department of Community Services
Sue LaPierre — United Way of Halifax Region

ORGANIZATIONS

Advocate Printing — Newsletter printing
Best Western Chocolate Lake — Launch venue
Grafton Street Dinner Theatre
Halifax Region Children's Aid Foundation — Funding support
Neptune Theatre
Nova Scotia Department of Community Services — Primary funding support
Nova Scotia Department of Education — Funding support
Nova Trophy — Award plaques
United Way of Halifax Region — Funding support
Veith House — Meeting venue

**The electronic version of this Newsletter, and more, are available on our website:
www.TheVoiceNewsletter.ca**

THE VOICE



Brandy



Lexxy



Chloe



Sky-Lynn



Cat



Ella



Wesley